Marriage and the Family PowerPoint Presentation

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Sam: This chapter shows us how the world of work was embedded in a rich array of family organization, community practices, everyday experiences, and collective attitudes. As with the economy, traditional habits and practices of daily life changed considerably over the eighteenth century.

Graham: Change was particularly dramatic in the growing cities of northwestern Europe, where traditional social controls were undermined by the increased social interaction of the urban setting. Change was also quite evident in the institution of marriage and the family.

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Sam: There were three basic reasons for getting married which influenced a choice of a partner for life in the eighteenth-century in Europe.

Graham: The first and most traditional motive for marriage was the economic, social or political consolidation. Marriage was thus primarily a contract between two families for the exchange of concrete benefits, not so much for the married couple. This is evident in the portrait painted by William Hogarth which shows an arranged marriage as the man is indifferent and the woman is distraught.

Sam: The second motive was personal affection, companionship and friendship based on the moral, intellectual and psychological qualities of the spouse. The rise of individualism together with a new respect for the individual pursuit of happiness and intellectual curiosity in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries brought about the rise of a companionate marriage.

Graham: The last motive was physical attraction stimulated by some degree of mutual experimentation before marriage. This was more common in the eighteenth century as a more liberal society evolved – breaking the ideals of the church. However, many people chose not to get married. (\*New Slide\*)

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Sam: During the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there was a considerably

high proportion of lifelong bachelors among younger sons of the nobility and gentry. If they were not lucky enough to marry an heiress, they could not afford to get married or served in the army where white women of the appropriate status were in a very short supply.

Graham: The situation of single women differed according to their financial and social position. The future life of well-off single women was safe. Women with lower income had to cope with much worse conditions. Their only hope was a good marriage.

Sam: Only at the very end of the eighteenth century, another occupation opened for well-educated unmarried women from decent homes. They could become governesses in wealthy households to young children under seven. Governesses suffered from both economic hardship and social stigma. They were usually badly paid and worked an incredible amount.

Graham: Another reason why many single-women were present in Europe was that it was the social custom that in the courtship process the male dictated the initiative when seeking the women, not the female. Women were also restricted in their choices to those men who made advances to them – they could only encourage the initiatives of men but could not formally initiate a courtship. This, and many other factors led to the large amount of late marriage in Europe. (\*New Slide\*)

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Sam: Most people did not marry young in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The average person married surprisingly late, many years after reaching adulthood and many more after beginning to work. Studies of England and France show that both men and women married for the first time at an average age of 25-27.

Graham: The main reason that marriage was delayed was that couples normally did not marry until they could start an independent household and support themselves and their future children. In the towns, men and women worked to accumulate enough savings to start a small business and establish their own home. This was a very big change in European society as many men and women thought not of just themselves but their future children and grandchilderen. This economic prioritization that flourished trickled down to the younger generation as they were raised in an economically responsible home. This created future generations to be economically responsible.

Sam: Law and tradition also made marriage difficult early in life. In some areas couples needed the legal permission to approval of the local lord or landowner in order to marry. Poor couples had difficulty marrying because local officials believed that freedom to marry for the lower classes would result in more landless paupers, more abandoned children, and more money for welfare. Because of these factors, nuclear families in Europe were common. (\*New Slide\*)

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Graham: Because census data from before the modern period are rare, historians have turned to parish registers of births, deaths and marriages to uncover details of European family life before the nineteenth century. These registers reveal that the three-generation extended family was a rarity in Europe by 1700.

Sam: Thus, the term nuclear families were created – a basic social unit comprising a couple and their dependent children. Also, when young European couples married, they normally established their own households and lived apart from their parents. This was a change because people were seeking economic and social independence. It was also a rarity for one to have extended families in Europe. This was due to people seeking economic opportunities outside from the traditional agriculture route that most had grown accustomed to rather, they moved to into cities working in textile mills and factories focusing on bettering themselves. (\*New Slide\*)

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Graham: Many young people worked within their families until they could start their own households. Boys usually plowed the field and tended cattle – but older boys could leave home to learn a trade as an apprentice to a craftsman. However, many boys, without craft skills, drifted from one tough job to another. Being an apprentice was not an ideal job for most because a boy would work on average a total of seven to fourteen years during which time he was not permitted to marry. If he were lucky, he would be able to join a guild as a craftsman and establish his own economic independence; but more often than not he worked as a hired hand at rough jobs and was always subject to economic fluctuations and unemployment.

Sam: Many adolescent girls also left their families to work. Their life was hard and the work was endless. However, the range of opportunities open to them was more limited. Apprenticeship was sometimes available in traditionally female occupations like a seamstress, linen draper or midwife. With the growth in production of finished goods during the eighteenth century, demand rose for skilled female labor and greater opportunities for women. This was a change because girls’ opportunities grew from the traditional home-help. Girls’ realized that they needed to have financial independence for themselves – which meant saving money to raise a financially sound family. Even though their economic and social sphere was larger, it was also exploited.

Graham: Many girls found themselves serving in another family’s household. However, this job was incredibly harsh. Constantly under the eye of her mistress, the servant girl had many tasks- cleaning, shopping, cooking and child care. Often these girls were viciously exploited. She was often easy prey for the head of the household or his sons or friends. If the girl became pregnant, she could be fired without notice and thrown out in disgrace. Many families could not or would not accept a girl back into the home. This forced many girls into terrible jobs such as prostitution and petty thievery.